

SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

BRIEFING

EDUCATION DAY OF ACTION – January 14, 2003

Senate Democrats have always been strong supporters of public schools. We believe teachers deserve fair compensation for the hard work they do. We believe students deserve the resources they need to learn. Our work will not be easy in today's budget crunch. But we must work hard to make sure our schools are safe places for children to learn and grow.

1. QUESTION: What is the Education Day of Action?

ANSWER: On January 14, teachers, support employees, school administrators, parents and students will rally in Olympia, Spokane, and the Tri-Cities to send a message to the state legislature about the need to continue investing in quality public schools.

2. QUESTION: Who is sponsoring the Education Day of Action?

ANSWER: The WEA is sponsoring the event. Organizations representing school administrators (WASA), school directors (WSSDA) and school principals (AWSP) sent a letter to legislators stating that their organizations do not support the Day of Action and school closures. However some individual school district boards of directors, superintendents and principals are supporting the event.

3. QUESTION: Why is the WEA holding the Day of Action?

ANSWER: The three messages are:

- Protect existing education funding including funding for cost-of-living increases under I-732 and for smaller class sizes under I-728.
- Provide competitive compensation including improved health benefits to attract and retain educational employees.
- Find long-term solutions for stable and adequate school funding.

4. QUESTION: Is this Day of Action a strike?

ANSWER: Most school districts have avoided a strike by releasing their employees for January 14th and have changed the school calendar so students will still

attend school for the required 180 days.

5. QUESTION: Since Washington is in a budget crisis, can these demands for improved education funding be met? What did the Governor do?

ANSWER: Under the state constitution, education is our paramount duty. Voters have told us that education is also their top priority. One of our biggest challenges this session is to find the resources to improve support for our schools. We believe that school employees should be well paid for the work they do.

The Governor's proposed budget eliminated the automatic COLA and the increased funding for I-728. Currently school districts receive \$220 per pupil under I-728 (\$140 from property taxes plus \$80 from lottery proceeds). I-728 requires \$450 per pupil beginning in the 2004-2005 school year (exclusively from property tax revenues; all lottery proceeds go to the education construction account beginning in FY2005).

(Note: after the recent state Supreme Court ruling which requires that, under the initiative as it is currently written, the COLA should be provided to all educational employees. All employees include those who are funded with state dollars as well as those who are funded with local levy or federal dollars. The potential cost of this decision could be as high as \$359 million. However, under the Court's decision, the legislature can change the COLA requirement since the court said that the COLA is not part of basic education.)

6. QUESTION: What have Senate Democrats done to support better salaries, smaller class size and stable funding?

ANSWER: During the past four years, Senate Democrats have improved the quality of education in Washington by providing the resources to reduce class sizes, provide planning days for teachers, and improve compensation. Gains were made in 1999 when beginning teachers' salaries were increased by 15% and experienced teachers' salaries were raised. The COLA was funded both in 2001 and 2002. Maintaining these gains will be difficult in the near future. Our children deserve a long-term solution for stable and adequate school funding.

